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ABSTRACT

This manual is concerned with helping already-established support groups maintain themselves over an extended period of time. It helps facilitators apply principles for addressing such problems as dissension within the group, poor attendance, losing sight of the group's purpose, and overdependence on a leader. The manual contains questionnaires to focus attention on key elements, tools for dissecting problems, forms for summarizing information, and exercises for building long- and short-term plans. Chapters cover the following topics: communication and behaviors that can help group members become more open with each other; specific problems that may confront a facilitator in trying to hold the group together, including situational, personal, and interpersonal factors; problems of attendance at meetings and ways to find out whether the group is meeting members' needs; ideas for helping a group through the difficult transition of losing members or adding new ones; delegating responsibility to group members to help them become more independent; a step-by-step problem-solving strategy for use during group meetings; and guidelines for identifying the extent of the support group's financial and other needs, agencies that might help, and ways to go about securing their help. (JDD)

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Strategies for Maintaining a Support Group

Oregon Health Sciences University
Portland, Oregon

Women's Educational Equity Act Program
U.S. Department of Education

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Strategies for Maintaining a Support Group

Strategies for Maintaining a Support Group

Pearl R. Paulson

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U.S. Department of Education
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John Hale and Gerald Buchan

Preface

This manual was prepared for support groups established by the Educational Equity Network of Disabled Women and Girls. Although the manual was prepared with these particular support groups in mind, it should also help other support groups with different membership and goals.

The project—An Educational Equity Network of Disabled Women and Girls—was funded from September 1983 through December 1984 with a grant from the Women's Educational Equity Act Program, U.S. Department of Education. The grant was awarded to the Children's Development and Rehabilitation Center, Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland, Oregon. Its directors were Pearl Paulson and Robin Stephens.

The purpose of the project was to make education more accessible to disabled women and girls by informing them of their right to an equitable education and assisting them to develop prerequisite attitudes and skills. It set up support groups where members could provide this information to each other and counsel and encourage each other. The project trained the facilitators and provided technical assistance to establish the group. This manual was developed to help the facilitators maintain their support groups beyond the funding period.

Each of the support groups was associated with an agency or organization that helped identify members, provided a meeting place, and provided one of each group's two co-facilitators. The second co-facilitator was a disabled woman who had been successful in attaining an education and other personal goals. The agencies, organizations, facilitators, and training staff provided much of the information found in this manual. It gives me pleasure to acknowledge them here.

Agencies in the Vicinity of Portland, Oregon

United Cerebral Palsy
TAPS Program, Epilepsy Association of Oregon
Oregon Museum of Science and Industry
Portland State University
Clackamas Community College
Tri-County Independent Living Program

Agencies in the Vicinity of Eugene, Oregon

University YWCA
Rehabilitation Network of Sacred Heart Hospital
Association of Retarded Citizens
Willamalane Parks and Recreation
Lane Community College
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Robin Stephens and Abby Rothschild in Portland, Oregon, and Mary Boomer in Eugene were the area coordinators. Without their wisdom, skill, and untiring effort there would be no support groups to maintain.

1

Introduction

A support group is collection of people who get together to discuss common problems and how these problems touch all aspects of their lives. They talk about themselves, their experiences, the pain, the humor, the setbacks, the successes. They also listen, ask questions, and show that they care. They exchange common experiences and feelings. They reassure each other of their personal worth and strengths and capacity for change. They give each other comfort and courage. They help each other to be realistic—and hopeful.

This manual is concerned with helping already established support groups maintain themselves over an extended period of time. The author's experience is with co-facilitators who provide their groups with only the leadership necessary to help members help each other. The groups engage in some structured learning experiences such as lectures, discussions, exercises, and role-plays. However, they depend heavily on members' capacity to join together to identify and solve problems.

Even once the groups are established the problems are not all over. Some old problems will recur and new ones will arise. Certain problems tend to plague established groups. These include dissension within the group, overdependence on a leader, waning membership and poor attendance, losing sight of the group's purpose and members' goals, facilitator burn-out, and loss of certain resources the group depends upon. The manual addresses these and other problems.

Whether encountering new problems or old problems with new wrinkles, the principles for addressing these problems remain constant. The manual helps facilitators apply these well-known principles to their own groups. It helps them to identify the problem that is currently presenting itself, to determine which members are most affected, to identify the resources currently available, and to develop a plan. It helps individuals to focus on their own particular groups and unique problems at a certain point in time.

This manual reviews principles. Its main purpose is not to impart information but to help the reader use information. The most important information lies within the group, its members, and its activities. The manual is essentially a workbook. It is designed to assist facilitators to uncover and use information. Its goal is to stimulate facilitators to analyze their group and develop plans for maintaining or improving the group's performance. It contains questionnaires to focus attention on key elements, tools for dissecting problems, forms for summarizing information, and exercises for building long- and short-term plans. It is a book to be read with pencil in hand! It is not a book to be read in an evening; it is a book to be written by the group over the course of time.

Overview of the Manual

Chapter 2 provides background that will help you become a better facilitator. It deals with open communication. It discusses categories of behavior that can help group members become more open with each other.

Chapter 3 begins to look at specific problems that may confront a facilitator in trying to hold the group together. It discusses factors that have an impact on a group's ability to maintain its own membership. It looks at situational, personal, and interpersonal factors that influence a group's ability to hold its members. Suggestions and exercises are included.

Chapter 4 looks at problems of attendance at meetings. It provides ways to find out whether the group is meeting the needs of its members. The chapter also suggests ways that the members of the group itself can help each other solve problems that cause absenteeism.

At some point, a group will lose members or add new ones. A support group that is built on relationships among its members can be very sensitive to any change in membership. Chapter 5 discusses this problem and provides some ideas for helping a group through this difficult transition.

A major goal of a support group is to help its members become independent. A major role of the facilitator is to encourage members in this regard. Chapter 6 discusses the concept of a facilitator delegating responsibility to group members. Record forms and guidelines accompany the discussion.

A good facilitator is hard to find. However, a good place to look for talent is among the members of a support group itself. Chapter 7 gives some guidelines for offering group members the opportunity to assume responsibility for the group operation. It can also provide the groundwork for recruiting new facilitators.

A support group is likely to need to confront many problems in order to accomplish its ends. There are problems that are the property of the entire group and there are problems that face individuals within the group. Chapter 8 deals specifically with solving problems. A step-by-step strategy is introduced that can be used during group meetings.

Chapter 9 acknowledges that a support group has many needs and that sometimes these needs must be met through the generosity of others. It gives guidelines for identifying the extent of those needs, agencies that might help, and ways to go about securing their help.

2

Open Communication

The purpose of a support group is to provide a supportive environment for its members. It is a way to help participants learn independence and self-reliance. However, it is sometimes easy for a facilitator to become so intensely involved in an interaction that she or he loses sight of the overall purpose of the group. This chapter looks at ways a facilitator can provide support while avoiding those pitfalls that reduce the group's effectiveness.

The chapter focuses on two kinds of group behavior. The first is behavior that enhances group goals by providing support. This is behavior that encourages *open communication*. The second kind of behavior we will examine is the flip side of open communication—*defensive behavior*. Defensive behavior becomes a deterrent to attaining a supportive group atmosphere.

Categories of Supportive Behavior

The following discussion is based on a model of six categories of behavior that tend to encourage open communication. Psychologist Jack Gibb (1961) identified the six categories and showed how they influence group climate. Each category refers to the way group members interact. This chapter presents Gibb's categories and how they effect open communication among support group members.

Category 1. Descriptive vs. Judgmental Statements

Speech is loaded with subtle, sometimes hidden meaning. For example, following an earth tremor that shook the house, a mother demanded "Bobby, where are you?" A plaintive, small voice answered "Mommy—I didn't do it."

Bobby lived in a home where everyone was defensive and protected themselves by accusing. To Bobby, his mother's question was an accusation.

To many, even a simple question implies judgment; if you question someone, it means that whatever she or he did was wrong. Of course, the trained and sensitive facilitator knows that to be false (right?). But the reaction is a common one. A group facilitator must be aware that any request for information—a simple question—can put people on the defensive and erect effective blocks to open communication.

For an open and supportive atmosphere rather than a judgmental one, questions put to the group must be requests for information. Ask for information that is *descriptive* ("tell me what you did"), not *judgmental* ("tell me what you did right!"). Avoid questions that imply that you are looking for "gotcha" answers: "Tell me what you did (so I can tell you what you did wrong)." Don't ask questions in hope that the person will change as a result of the answer.

Suppose a member has difficulty obtaining transportation to a meeting. A

descriptive question would focus on the problem and potential solutions, e.g., "Suppose you had the problem another time. What are some of the things you can try? Does anyone in the group have a similar problem?" A judgmental question might be "O.K., what didn't you do? What should you have done?" Avoid the guilt words: *should, could, would.*

As facilitator, you may need to ask questions about sensitive topics. Do so with care, you may step on toes. Choose your words well, avoiding words that are loaded. Words like *failed, blew it, are incapable,* etc. must be avoided. Be descriptive. Refer to "the problem of obtaining transportation," not "the failure to find a ride."

Exercise 2.1 at the end of this chapter is designed to help you analyze and compare judgmental and descriptive statements.

Category 2. Problem Solving vs. Controlling

Sometimes the best intentions in the world can actually do the most damage. This can happen when group members interpret the facilitator's behavior as an attempt to control rather than to assist. The controlling versus problem-solving trap is effective at catching even the most competent facilitator. It is sprung when the facilitator loses sight of the fact that the job is to *help* people solve problems, not solve the problems *for* people.

When the facilitator takes the role of problem-solving helper, not controller of the problem solver, she or he encourages a similar attitude in the group. A facilitator who shows an interest in a *collaborative* effort to find solutions, helps create a similar orientation in other participants. As a problem *solver*, the facilitator has no predetermined solution, method, or attitude to impose. Even if you *do* know answers, it is best to let people struggle with the answers themselves. Open communication occurs best among equals, not where the facilitator has all the answers.

Sometimes it is appropriate to remind yourself of ancient wisdom when helping a group member confront a problem. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day . . . teach him to fish and you feed him for life."

Your job as facilitator is to help members find their own solutions to problems. Make this clear early. Say it to the group in so many words. Then do what you say. Listen to your speech to be sure that you do not give a different message. The group members are, after all, conditioned to expect "leaders" to lead, to take control. Our society is full of well-orchestrated attempts to control each other's behavior through speech. Much of what passes for teaching, parenting, and ministering involves control over other people's behavior. Don't let members perceive you as just another person trying to exercise control over their behavior!

Exercise 2.2 at the end of this chapter is designed to help you examine the tendency to exercise control over the behavior of others.

Category 3. Spontaneous vs. Deceptive

There are three principles on which support groups operate: (1) People who are open and straightforward earn trust, (2) people who are deceptive breed distrust, and (3) members of support groups size up facilitators accordingly!

You, as facilitator, have goals and objectives for yourself and for the group. Don't hide these objectives or try to manipulate the group into your way of thinking. You may hide the objective, but not that there is an objective. You also may not be able to hide from the group's aroused defenses.

Conversely, if participants perceive you as free of deception, and that you are

straightforward and honest, then you are less likely to produce a defensive reaction. The key: be spontaneous and open and free of manipulative strategy. This advice falls into the category "easier said than done," however. This is illustrated by the facilitator who, while using her best skills to draw out a quiet but hostile group member, was accused of "using a listening strategy on me!"

Exercise 2.3 is designed to help you identify and analyze behavior that group members might perceive as deceptive (manipulative) or spontaneous (open).

Category 4. Accepting vs. Dogmatic

A dogmatic person is one who always has the "right answer," and what's more, thinks that answer applies to everyone. Not only do they know all the answers, they need no additional information (and are not willing to accept it if offered). They put people on guard. A dogmatic person stimulates feelings of inferiority and hostility.

A group is likely to become closed and defensive in the presence of a facilitator they perceive as dogmatic. Probably the best way to avoid the perception of being dogmatic is not to be dogmatic. Maintaining an "open mind" helps (so long as it is not maintained dogmatically). However, an open mind is not enough. A facilitator must be willing to experiment with behavior, ideas, and attitudes.

Exercise 2.4 is designed to give the group and the facilitator practice at developing many possible solutions to a given problem without an emphasis on finding the *one and only* right answer.

Category 5. Empathy vs. Distant Neutrality

A major goal of a support group is to provide social and emotional support to its members. The facilitator plays a major role in creating an atmosphere supporting this goal. A facilitator must be able to accept the emotional reactions of members at face value and show concern for personal welfare. In short, a facilitator must empathize with group members.

But empathy does not mean sympathy. Empathy means concern for an individual's welfare and support of her or his attempts to solve problems. Often it means simply stating "I know you have a problem and I know you are frightened." It does not mean feeling sorry for the individual—feeling sorry (sympathy) creates the feeling of distance between facilitator and the group, which interferes with open communication.

Often a good approach to creating an environment supportive of empathy is for the facilitator to talk about the situation confronting the individual and how an individual in that situation may feel. Don't get into a mental set that empathy only is appropriate in negative situations. You can also acknowledge that a person is delighted at the outcome of a positive experience.

Exercise 2.5 at the end of this chapter is designed to help you analyze statements made by a facilitator with respect to empathy.

Category 6. Equality vs. Superiority

The question of the facilitator's equality with the group members is a frequent issue in a support group. There may be many differences between you and the members of the group. The perception of these differences can become a barrier to open communication. As facilitator, you may have more status, power, or ability than others in the group. Status implies the power and the ability to control and manipulate. It puts you in the position of being a person who can wield control if

you so choose. As a person with status, you are exactly the kind of person who can stimulate defensive reactions.

However, while your status can make people defensive, it does not have to. There are steps you can take to show people that you are not going to use your power to control individuals or manipulate the group. It is up to you to encourage an atmosphere based on equality. You must deal with people in the group as equals. You must convince them that you are ready to enter participative planning with mutual trust and respect.

The question of maintaining an atmosphere of equality interacts with each of the other categories. Exercise 2.6 encourages you to analyze the question of equality with respect to the other categories.

Summary

As facilitator, you are in a central and powerful position with respect to a support group. The way you use that status will have an enormous impact on your effectiveness as a facilitator. You can use that status to focus attention on yourself as a model of a person willing to engage in open communication.

With status comes power. You can use that power to bring about conditions that support open communication or you can use it to show yourself as a power broker. You can use that power to teach people to describe rather than judge, to help rather than dictate, to be direct rather than manipulative, to empathize on a human level, and to treat each other as equals.

There is an active role here. When a member behaves in an unpleasant manner, discourage others from trying to control the person. Help them discover the underlying problem. Be a model of honesty and spontaneity and encourage others to do the same. Don't let one member "shoot another down." Encourage people to describe different feelings or ideas.

The most important thing you can facilitate in your group is open communication.

Exercise 2.1. Identify Descriptive and Judgmental Questions

Reflect on the verbal interactions within your group. Recall two or more judgmental statements made during a recent meeting. Did members react defensively? Then recall two or more descriptive statements. Then make a second list of statements. How did members react?

1. Judgmental Questions:

   Reactions:

2. Descriptive Questions:

   Reactions:

Exercise 2.2. Controlling vs. Solving Problems

In an effort to solve member's transportation difficulties, a facilitator could follow several strategies. One facilitator might prepare a list of helpful suggestions for dealing with transportation problems. Another could call the problem to the attention of the group and ask the member with the problem to discuss the problem with other members and encourage the group to help find solutions.

Look at your own group and list events that

1. reflect your ability as problem solver

2. reflect your tendency to control behavior

Now, share this list with your group and determine whether they perceive your behavior in the same way. Remember, the key to reducing defensiveness is in how *they* perceive you, not how *you* perceive your own motives. This activity will not just give *you* feedback about *your* behavior, it will encourage members to evaluate their own behavior in the group.

Exercise 2.3. Spontaneous vs. Deceptive Behavior

Do you applaud some suggestions and keep directing attention to the "good" ones (in your opinion), or do you welcome all ideas and let the group evaluate them?

The statements that follow are suggestions from a group trying to solve its transportation problems. Imagine yourself in the role of facilitator. For each statement, write down one or more statements you could make that indicate a spontaneous response (the kind you want to make) and one or more manipulative statements (the kind you want to avoid). The first item is done for you.

1. *Group member:* "I think we should contact the city bus company and ask them to add a new route that goes past my house!" (This individual lives at the end of a dead-end street.)

   Facilitator (spontaneous example): "That's one thing we could do. A bus past the house certainly would solve your problem wouldn't it!"

   Facilitator (manipulative example): "Can't you come up with a better idea than that!"

2. *Group member:* "I feel so helpless, I just don't know who to call for a ride."

   Facilitator (spontaneous):

   Facilitator (manipulative):

3. *Group member:* "I don't know why our group is the one that has all the problems."

   Facilitator (spontaneous):

   Facilitator (manipulative):

4. *Group member:* "I need wheelchair access, and the bus company won't do a thing about it!"

   Facilitator (spontaneous):

   Facilitator (manipulative):

Exercise 2.4. Dogmatism vs. Accepting Behavior

Here is an exercise to perform in a group meeting. Explain to the group that part of your job as a facilitator is to draw out and accept ideas from the other members of the group.

As a group, select a problem that needs a solution. It should be a real problem and one about which the group cares. Ask the group spend 15 to 20 minutes working on a problem. Encourage them to be as creative as possible in stating solutions.

List the solutions. Encourage the group to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each solution. Once all solutions have been discussed, ask the group to select from among the possible solutions the one to try first. Encourage the attitude that the group is selecting a working solution from among possible solutions, not that they are seeking the "right" solution. Encourage the attitude that they try a solution that appears most likely to work and if that fails, try another.

Exercise 2.5. Empathy vs. Sympathy

Following is a list of statements that a facilitator might make to the members of a group.

Examine each for the degree to which the group members are likely to feel that the facilitator empathizes with the group. Rewrite those statements that you think demonstrate empathy poorly, and write "good" next to those that you think are acceptable.

a. "Let's get on with it."

b. "How did you feel when that happened?"

c. "Oh my, that makes me feel so bad I just don't know what to do."

d. "His answer didn't make you feel any better."

e. "Don't you think it's time you grew up!"

f. "Thank you for sharing that with us. I'm sure we all feel that we know you just a little better."

g. "O.K., who has the next sob story to tell us?"

Exercise 2.6. Equality vs. Superiority

Review the categories. For each, think of yourself at recent group meetings. Recall what the group discussed and think about your role in the discussions. Record the evidence you have that members perceived you as:

a. descriptive or judgmental

b. problem solver or controller

c. spontaneous or deceptive

d. empathetic or neutral

3

Maintaining Membership

Maintaining its own membership is one of a support group's primary functions. A support group can help people who maintain their membership, but it cannot help the dropouts! The purpose of this chapter is to provide information that will help solve the problem of group members leaving the group altogether. Chapter 4 will consider the related problem of poor attendance.

People will tend to remain members of a group where the climate is pleasant, and where the facilitator and fellow members make them feel comfortable. Members will stick with a group if they feel they are getting something worthwhile from the meetings. Your challenge as facilitator is to discover those factors that produce a pleasant group climate and to understand specifically what benefits members of the group hope to obtain from the group.

This chapter discusses some of the factors that have an impact on a group's ability to maintain its membership.

The Meeting Place

If the group's meeting place is pleasant, people are more likely to remain involved than if it is unpleasant. A good place to start is an evaluation of your group's "creature comforts." Exercise 3.1 is designed to help in this evaluation.

As you answer the questions, be specific. If the physical setting is pleasant, describe what makes it pleasant—specifically! If there is attractive wall decoration or a pleasant view from the window, list it. If there are distractions like uncomfortable chairs, or stained carpets, note them. Is the furniture and paint in good condition? Is there space to spread out materials, to take notes? Is there access for people with disabilities? Is there a "host" to greet people when they enter? Is there a refreshment table?

Encouraging Group Participation

People who participate actively in a group and who feel good about their participation are likely to retain their membership. As facilitator, encouraging group members to participate actively is one of your major challenges. Many of the factors discussed in the previous chapter have strong impact on the degree to which members are willing to participate. As you work through the examples, refer back to these principles.

There are many ways you as facilitator can encourage participation. Adopting the attitude of carefully listening to each member is important. Body language is a key: physically facing the speaker and maintaining eye contact encourages participation. Nods and a sympathetic expression are also effective.

Exercise 3.2 is designed to examine factors that influence participation within a group.

Discouraging Nonproductive Behavior

The chapter on open communication discussed factors that increase or decrease defensive behavior in groups. Behavior that increases defensiveness will have a negative impact on group participation. This in turn will tend to drive some members away from the group.

Exercise 3.3 is designed to reduce the incidence of behavior that discourages productive group behavior.

Addressing Personal Needs

There are many reasons to join a support group and much to be gained from membership. High on the list for nearly everyone is *affiliation*. People seek support from a group where they perceive members have something in common with themselves, where they need not apologize for things they cannot change, and where their personal joys and triumphs are recognized and understood.

Exercise 3.4 is designed to help you focus on the personal needs of the members in a support group. You may find it helpful in understanding the factors that hold a strong group together. It may also help explain why some members may not fit into the group as well as others.

Finding Additional Bonds

It is often easy to recognize the common bonds that hold a group together. Most support groups are organized around some common need or problem. They are often the central theme of the meetings. However, certain members will not recognize this common need as a source of affiliation. The reason may be a psychological defense (they can acknowledge the need only in other members, not in themselves). Until they are ready to acknowledge their own need, it is important that they share other secondary bonds.

Exercise 3.5 is designed to help you identify secondary bonds that can help cement your group. It is simply a form that permits you to record information about each group member. When you have acquired a large base of data about the members, review the information looking for factors that can serve as a basis of affiliation.

Creating a Caring Atmosphere

Members stay in groups so long as they feel *wanted*, *valued*, and *cared about*. And caring is shown as much in the little things as the grand gesture. We show we care by saying hello and good-bye when members arrive and leave. We use names and add a stroke or two ("nice to see you, Sally"). Acknowledging personal celebrations (birthdays, special events) also show that a person has value.

You can use a form to record important facts about group members. One such form is provided in Exercise 3.6.

There are other, more subtle ways to show someone that she or he is valued. You can demonstrate a member's importance to the group by giving them responsibilities—and pointing out publicly the importance of these responsibilities. Responsibilities provide opportunities for earning such appreciation.

Some responsibilities that might be given to group members are as follows:

- note taking
- something to "look up" and report
- bringing a refreshment to share

Use the Group Responsibility Planning Form in Exercise 3.7 as you plan activities for your group.

Making Members Feel Appreciated

We have been pointing out that a way to keep members from leaving a group is to make them feel appreciated. If members feel truly welcome in the group and have an important part to play as a group member, they will be more likely to continue their membership.

Exercise 3.8 involves what might be called a warm fuzzy tally form. It is simply a tally form that can help you become aware of opportunities to give members positive strokes. Make one form for each member of your group. Record the date of each group meeting or other event. Note whether the person was greeted upon arrival. This will permit you to discover if, for instance, no one bothers to say "hello" to a member for six months; if this happens, she or he is more likely to drop out of the group.

The form also has a place to record whether any compliments were given, if any celebrations were acknowledged, and if the person was given any responsibility within the group.

Don't be cavalier about this form. You may say to yourself "of course we greet everybody, of course we remember birthdays . . . " Record these events and look for interesting patterns. You may find someone who is being overlooked.

Creating Opportunities

Members stay with groups that offer the opportunity to learn something they want to know or develop skills they need. When group goals match personal objectives, members are encouraged. When members make recognizable progress toward their own objectives, they are satisfied.

Members can develop skills by assuming responsibilities related to group activities or they can develop skills outside. When learning skills outside the group, the members can rely on the group to provide encouragement and feedback. A group will be strengthened if members use new skills both inside and outside the group.

Exercise 3.9 involves a form to record members' progress toward personal goals. Let the group help individual members identify their goals and develop plans for reaching them. The form has space to record each member's goals, activities to reach those goals, resources and help, and the information gathered showing progress toward the goal. Completing this form can be a useful group activity with all members providing information and feedback.

Maintenance Activities

This chapter has been concerned with reasons within the support group itself why people continue their membership in the group: affiliation, self-enhancement, and personal development.

Exercise 3.10 helps you to scrutinize how well your group is addressing these needs.

Summary

It is important to ask members frequently if their needs are being met. Put this on the agenda for your next meeting. Ask them so that you can find out what to keep doing, what to do harder, and what to change.

There is another reason to ask them these questions. The questions get them to *say* that they are getting something out of the group. You need to hear it, and so do they! Get them to recognize that the group is giving them what they want, whether it is friendships, encouragement, or training. If this is true, and they realize it is so, you will keep their membership.

Exercise 3.1. Physical Setting Rating Form

Evaluate the physical comforts provided. Describe your meeting place in the space provided.

What creature comforts are there?

___Wall decoration

___ Floor covering

___ Lighting

___ Noise/sound

___ Ventilation/odors

___ Chair comfort

___ Seating arrangement

___ Work space

___ Refreshments

___ Host/hostess

___ Other factors: _____

_____

_____

Is there anything that the facilitator or the members might do to make the setting of your meetings more friendly? (This could be a topic for group discussion.)

Exercise 3.2. Encouraging Participation in Group Discussion

Think about your most recent group meeting. Use this form to describe what was said or done to encourage participation.

1. List specific words or phrases you use to show that you are actively listening. Describe your "body language" and list the ways in which it transmits the message that you are interested and listening.

2. Describe words and body language used by group members to show whether they are actively listening. (You might want to observe members at your next group meeting before filling out this item.)

3. Describe steps you have taken to teach group members to actively listen to one another.

4. Describe group rules that specifically promote acceptance.

Exercise 3.3. Discouraging Nonproductive Behavior

Review chapter 2 and identify productive and nonproductive behaviors as they occur in your group. Address each of the following questions with respect to how open communication is encouraged or discouraged in your group.

1. How do you personally model open communication? Has your group talked about open communication and role-played ways to communicate openly?

2. Describe something that relieves tension in your group.

3. How are conflicts handled typically? Is the process constructive or destructive?

4. If conflicts are handled negatively, what can you do to make it more positive?

Exercise 3.4. Affiliation in Your Group

Answer the following five questions about your group and its sources of affiliation. Be specific and detailed in your answers.

1. What is the common bond that these members share? What is the glue that holds them together?

2. Why is this common bond important to them? What have members said or done that supports your answer?

3. Which members do not share this common bond with other members? How can their affiliation needs be met in the group—or can they?

4. Are there major differences that interfere with affiliation? What have members said or done that supports this? If it is just a hunch, say so.

5. How can these differences be minimized?

Exercise 3.5. Finding Additional Bonds

Complete the following form, including each member of your group. This will become a source document of information on the special characteristics of each person in the group. When you have completed the form, look for commonalities that may form the basis of affiliation.

Member	Age	Occupation	Education	Significant Attribution	Significant Experience

An analysis of common bonds:

Exercise 3.6. A Calendar of Celebrations

(Filling in this form can be a good group activity.)

Month	Member*	Event	Date	Celebration	Plan
Jan.					
Feb.					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
Aug.					
Sept.					
Oct.					
Nov.					
Dec.					

*Be sure to record group celebrations as well as individual celebrations (e.g., anniversary of group's founding, farewell to an old member).

Exercise 3.7. Group Responsibility Planning Form

List the name of each member of your group. Jot down one or two specific responsibilities that each might reasonably be expected to assume.

Name	**Responsibility**
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____
_____	a. _____
	b. _____

Exercise 3.8. Which Members Feel Appreciated?

Member: _____

Date	Greeted?	Complimented?	Celebration?	Responsibilities?

Exercise 3.9. Individual Growth Plan

Member's Name: _____

Goal: _____

Short-term Objective	Instrumental Activity	Needed Resources (People, Materials)	Criteria and Target Date

Exercise 3.10. Group Success in Meeting Personal Needs: An Evaluation

1. Which members share major things in common with other members?

   a. What are these common bonds?

   b. What specific occurrences have made members aware of their common bonds?

   c. How has your group shown an appreciation for diversity as well as mutuality?

2. How does your group promote the self-worth of each member individually? How many members do you think are there primarily because they want to feel needed, valued, and wanted?

   a. What specific "strokes" or "warm fuzzies" have you seen given these particular members?

   b. Did the member show appreciation for this recognition? How?

   c. Do these members do anything to "invite" appreciation or recognition?

   d. Do members ever arrive or leave without being told hello and good-bye?

e. What personal milestones has the group celebrated or acknowledged (birthdays, graduations, enrolling in a class, finishing a class, moving to a better living situation, new equipment, new skills, any step toward greater independence or other personal goals)?

f. What responsibilities are delegated to members?

g. How are members' contributions acknowledged by the group?

3. Does the group provide the members with the opportunity for self-improvement? Do members appreciate this opportunity?

a. Have you asked members what information they wanted from the group and how much they are actually receiving? List some of the specific replies.

b. Have you asked members what skills they wanted and what progress have they made in developing these skills? List some of the specific replies.

c. How often do you check with members to see if they are reaching their personal goals for attending the group meetings? How do you check?

4. Did this activity include any questions you could not answer? Were you dissatisfied with any of your answers? If so, what are you going to do to change it?

4

Maintaining Attendance

In the last chapter we looked at the problem of people dropping out of the group altogether. In this chapter we will look at the problem of people who stay in the group but frequently miss meetings.

It is discouraging when people do not show up for meetings. Many activities require that a certain number be present. Expensive materials and supplies may go unused. It may be personally embarrassing if you've invited a guest.

It's also demoralizing to the group itself. Members may ask, "If the group isn't worthwhile for others, is it worthwhile for me?" And their perception is accurate. Nonattendance means that the "glue" that should be holding the group together is weak.

Reasons for Nonattendance: Internal

There are several ways to look at the internal reasons that people are not attending meetings. Let us first look at reasons related to the members' motivation. The first question is clear: "Are people's individual needs being met?" Did you, or they, misunderstand what those needs were? Review the previous chapter, "Maintaining Membership." If you have not completed Exercises 3.5 and 3.8, do so now, if only for those with poor attendance.

Have the needs of members already been met? If so, maybe it is time to congratulate yourselves and disband. Or is it time to reassess those needs? If so, you may want to administer a needs survey and set new goals.

But there are other reasons for poor attendance that have little to do with personal needs. Ask yourself, "Are the meetings FUN?" Even "serious" meetings need some light moments! Do you devote at least part of each meeting to something that is purely enjoyable? Look at this aspect of your meetings. Study members' faces at the next meeting. Do people *look* like they are having a good time? If not, it's time for some research. But remember the principles of open communication. Avoid statements like "O.K., now I want to know just exactly why you folks are not enjoying yourselves." Instead, ask for positive information: "What can we do to have fun at our next meeting?"

Variety is the "spice of life." Is there enough variety in your meetings? Are meetings so predictable that people are becoming bored? Pull in guest speakers. Arrange field trips. Plan some celebrations. There are several ideas presented in the previous chapter. *Never* miss a birthday (including your own). Ask members to suggest new or unusual activities. Don't forget to celebrate your group's anniversary!

Exercise 4.1 contains a checklist that can be used to record reasons for nonattendance.

Reasons for Nonattendance: External

If people like the meetings, they are going to try to attend as many meetings as possible. But sometimes obstacles seem insurmountable even to motivated people. Here are some guidelines.

Don't expect the individual to solve all attendance problems alone. Sometimes help is needed! But remember that you want to be perceived just as one person who has input, as well as someone who can help in solving problems, but not as having all the answers, or the one "right" answer. Don't try to help the person all by yourself. It is, after all, a *support* group. Encourage the entire group to work on the problem. (We will deal with this topic in detail in chapter 8, "Solving Not-So-Petty Problems.")

Some common problems leading to poor attendance and some possible approaches to solving those problems are provided in Exercise 4.2. This Problem Analysis Form will provide guidance for solving some of the more typical ones.

Attendance Policy

Sometimes a member will not understand the importance of attendance at meetings. They do not realize that they are missed when they are absent. The member may be unaware of the time and expense involved in preparing for a meeting or the embarrassment of a guest speaker with no audience. A useful activity for the group is to establish its own attendance guidelines.

Some suggestions for establishing an attendance policy follow:

- Ask members to list reasons for good attendance at their groups.
- Let them create a policy for good attendance.
- If attendance is a problem for some members, let them consider the merits of a reminder system. Do not take the lead in suggesting what the system should be.

Recognizing a Temporary Situation

Sometimes attendance varies in a predictable but temporary manner. Often attendance at activities drops during the summer for well-known reasons. But remember before canceling the meeting—sometimes those who do not have a reason not to attend may need support all the more.

Summary

When attendance is poor the facilitator's first question is "How might members become more motivated to attend?" It is becoming an old refrain in this book—but it is so important that it bears repeating. The facilitator must encourage the group to find the answer. The members are in the group for group support, not for the leader to play nursemaid.

Once the group is satisfied that the motivation to attend is sufficiently strong, they are ready to help individual members overcome personal obstacles to attendance. We will return to this topic with specific suggestions in chapter 8, "Solving Not-So-Petty Problems."

Exercise 4.1. Internal Reasons for Poor Attendance

Name of member with poor attendance: _____

Reason given: _____

1. Person's goal:

   Are meetings relevant?

   What progress does the person see?

2. What does the person have in common with others members?

   Positive things:

   Negative things:

   Nothing in common:

3. During the last two times this member attended, how did you and the group pay attention to the person?

Positive	**Negative**
___ Greeted	___ Not greeted
___ Compliments given	___ Left to self
___ Visit informally	___ Embarrassed
___ Given responsibility	___ Given reprimand

4. Does the person seem to find the meetings fun?

   At the last meeting attended, what did the person seem to enjoy?

   At the last meeting missed, did the person know beforehand what was planned?

   Was it something the person might have enjoyed?

Exercise 4.2. Problem Analysis Form

This form will help with an analysis of some of the more typical problems that confront members of a support group.

1. *Transportation.* Here are some possible ways to address this problem.
   Are there some transportation resources that have not been tried?

   Could everyone get to meetings if the group met someplace else?

   Can the group or any member in the group barter some service in exchange for private transportation?

2. *Schedule conflicts.* Is the meeting time inconvenient?

   Is there a better time to meet?

   Can the member's other activities be rescheduled?

   Do members need to reexamine their priorities in relation to the scheduling problems?

3. *Forgetting.* It's not a facilitator's job to remind people of meetings. But the members themselves might take responsibility for reminding each other.

   Members might pair up so that a person who never forgets reminds a person who almost never remembers in exchange for some return favor.

   Some groups set up a telephone list where each member calls the next person on the list. The last person on the list calls the first person, ensuring that everyone has been reminded. Members who are good at remembering engagements can be asked to share their own strategies with others.

   The group might decide to set up a system to recognize and reward good or improved attendance.

5

Changing Membership

This chapter looks into the events that occur when a group's membership changes. At some time or another, old members will leave a group and new members will be added. This can be a major event in a support group where members have grown to trust each other and have learned to communicate.

A support group is particularly vulnerable during membership transition. When membership changes, the group's interpersonal structure changes. Pecking orders change. Friendships shift. The power structure is rearranged.

All members react to membership changes. Some may grieve, some may feel guilt, and some may feel relief when a member leaves. Often they experience all three simultaneously. Members also react to the addition of a member. They may feel insecure with a new person or they may resent the intrusion.

Whatever the reaction, two things remains constant. First, over time, any group's membership will change. It is inevitable. Second, the remaining members of the original group will react to that change.

As facilitator, you must be prepared to help members adapt effectively to changes in membership.

When Members Leave

Since loss of a group member will have an impact on the group, it is important that members deal with each aspect of the change. When someone leaves, it is an important event that must be acknowledged openly. When a member leaves, the group acknowledges the loss and says "good-bye" to the departing member. It is important not just for the person leaving but for all those who stay.

Those who remain need to realize that there is something positive in the departure. It may mean that someone has achieved the goals set forth and is ready to move on. The departure can be greeted as a kind of graduation. A departure may mean that a person's needs have changed, that she or he can find help more appropriately elsewhere. The group can then go on meeting the needs of the other members. There is something beneficial for both the group and for the member leaving. It is for everyone's good.

The departure of a member is a good opportunity to examine whether or not the group is actually serving the needs of its members. If the member had needs that the group was not set up to handle, the group should recognize that this is not failure. The group may have the opportunity to suggest other resources for that person. This is also an opportunity for the group to examine itself. Are the needs of the remaining members being addressed?

Sometimes a member may outgrow the group. Celebrate! Encourage the group to accept its proper share of credit for the achievement. Here you can play an

important role. Remind them that it was *their* support that helped the person achieve the goal. Encourage the group to look at itself and reexamine its function and goals. Encourage each member to look at her or his personal progress and to reexamine what they want to get from the group before they, too, leave.

Many times a member must leave the because of circumstances beyond her or his control. If a member wishes to participate but is unable to continue, encourage the group to discuss the reason. Let the group try to generate solutions. If there is no way to solve the problem, ask the group to consider other kinds of support that the member might seek.

In all cases, when a member leaves, be sure everyone gets to say good-bye. This is best in person, maybe with a party. If a personal good-bye is impossible, send individual letters or a letter from the entire group, composed and signed by everyone.

It is important to remember that just because someone is no longer able to attend, the person does not cease to exist. Encourage both the group and the person to keep in touch by letters or telephone. You can even arrange to send tape recordings of special events and meetings. Maybe a remaining member would be interested in accepting the job of keeping in touch with earlier members.

Exercise 5.1 is designed to help record and organize information on members leaving a group.

Adding a New Member

Any time a new member comes to a group, the dynamics change. Members have learned to be comfortable with each other. They have a pecking order that feels natural. They know the limits and what is safe. They can predict what others are likely to do. A new member is an unknown. There is a new set of risks.

There are many reasons for adding new members to a group. The decision to add a new member may not come from within the group at all. An outside agency that sponsors the group may make the decision to add a member and even select the person. Existing members are likely to perceive this as an intrusion, as a violation of the group itself. It is important that they recognize that their negative feelings are toward the outside agency forcing the change on them rather than toward the new member personally.

Sometimes, a new member may seek out the group and request membership. The group may react in a variety of ways. On the positive side, the group may see such attention as an affirmation of the group's value. The group must be valuable because others want in! But it can also be seen as an intrusion, a threat from the outside.

If a group's membership is dwindling, it may be up to the group to go out and recruit new members in order to survive or be effective. This move is not without impact. On the one hand, it may be viewed by the members as the opportunity to share a good thing, to serve others with similar needs. On the other hand it may arouse anxiety or even resentment: "If we have to recruit members, what we have may not be so good after all!"

There are several ways to recruit new members. A good place to start is to ask existing members for suggestions, both for possible new members and how new members will be recruited. This alone builds group acceptance. You may go to organizations, agencies, and treatment centers that also provide service to members of the group. This helps ensure that the new member will have something in common with existing members.

No matter how the new member is identified, you must deal with the potential

impact of new members on the group. A first step is to gain group consensus on the process itself.

Following are topics on which the group should have consensus:

1. Will the group benefit from adding or replacing a member and are members willing to accept a new member?
2. Can the group agree on the *kind* of person that is wanted? What traits must the new person have to "belong" and be an asset to the group?
3. Can the group identify the kind of person who would be a poor choice for membership?

Presenting a New Member

There are some guidelines to help the facilitator present a potential member to a group. First, describe the person to the group. Recall the basic purpose of the group: does the person "need" the group? Is the person too needy to benefit from the group? Place particular emphasis on the kind of support the individual requires and is able to give in return.

Once it is agreed or understood that a certain person will join the group, have the group complete Exercise 5.2.

Summary

If the group is to add a new member, your role as facilitator can make the process go smoothly. You can help ensure that the group itself participates in the important decisions involved in adding a member, in the selection of the member, and the new member's orientation. Even if the group is in the unfortunate position of having the new member imposed by outside circumstances, you can still help facilitate the process by having the group prepare an appropriate welcome. In the worst case, you can help them separate their feelings about having a new member thrust upon them and their feelings toward the new member personally.

The overall process not only ensures that the new person will be made welcome, it preserves the existing members' feeling of control and safety while the change is in progress. Just as important, it reinforces the concept that a support group is composed of members sustaining each other.

Exercise 5.3 is designed to analyze the process of adding a new member.

Exercise 5.1. Membership Problems

Here are some questions that may help you address problems involving membership change.

1. What is the reason for leaving?

   a. Did the person have needs that could not be served by the group? Specify.

   b. Did the individual's needs change? How were these changes influenced by the group?

   c. Were needs satisfied so that the departing member no longer needed the group? (Be specific.)

   d. Were there obstacles beyond their control which prevented the member from continuing?

2. Did the group get to say "good-bye"?

   a. Describe the "good-bye" activity.

   b. What specific arrangements were made to help the transition of the person departing?

   c. What steps helped those remaining adjust to the change?

   d. Did each group member end up feeling good about the departure?

3. What did you learn from the events described above? If you are dissatisfied with any of the events, what would you do differently next time?

   a. The activity of "saying good-bye."

   b. Collecting information that members had or had not succeeded as group members.

   c. Facilitating the process of departure.

   d. Helping the remaining members adjust to the change.

Exercise 5.2. Welcoming New Members to the Group

1. Have the group review and discuss the rules that govern the group. These rules include confidentiality, attendance, and the like. The group must know its rules and expectations and have a plan for communicating them to the new member.

2. Encourage the group to plan specific ways to welcome the newcomer and to make the newcomer feel welcome. This is a good opportunity to encourage group members to accept personal responsibility for some aspect of the group's functioning. If each member accepts a specific role in the welcoming process, the entire structure of the group may be strengthened.

3. Have the group plan how each member will participate in the orientation of the new member. Be sure that each topic is covered (e.g., purposes, routines, and expectations).

4. Finally, the addition of a new member will probably have only a temporary impact on the group. Eventually, the group will become stabilized with its new membership. Help the group understand that there is a transition period that may last a few minutes, or a few weeks.

Exercise 5.3. Adding a New Member

The following exercise should help if your group has added a new member since the group was established, or if it is considering adding a new member. Answer the following questions:

1. How did the group come to add a new member? Where did the new recruit come from? What were the circumstances?

2. Describe the overall characteristics of the transition period (i.e., that time during which the group adjusted to the new member).

3. How did the group maintain its cohesiveness and "safety" during the transition?

4. Did the group review its rules prior to the entrance of the new member? How did they go about conveying the rules to the new member?

5. In what ways did the group participate in the decision to add a member, and in approving, welcoming, and orienting the member? (Be specific!)

6. Examine your answers. Is there room for improvement the next time a member is added? What is your plan?

6

Delegating Responsibility within Your Group

The ability of the facilitator to delegate part or all of the responsibility for facilitating may be a key element in the ultimate success of a group. Chapter 2 recommended that facilitators delegate responsibility in order to enhance members' sense of personal worth and develop their competence. Delegating responsibility also enhances the group as a whole. As members take on responsibility, they have greater personal investment in the group and the group is strengthened. Also, as members assume some of the routine tasks, the facilitator can expend more energy on the overall goals and attend to the more subtle aspects of group process.

This chapter provides specific direction for successfully delegating responsibilities that might otherwise be assumed by the facilitator. It also has activities to help you delegate activities according to your members' needs and objectives.

The effectiveness with which you as a facilitator delegate responsibility will play a major role in effective group operation. You can't just start delegating willy-nilly. You need to select the responsibilities carefully. Certain goals and activities cannot be delegated easily. You also need to select the person carefully. Particularly "fragile" members in your group may not be able to assume heavy responsibility. Members must have sufficient social, emotional, or physical independence to take on a responsibility. However, with more or less assistance, all members should have the opportunity to take on some responsibility—for their personal development as well as for the group's benefit.

To ensure success, match job descriptions to members' capabilities. First, you identify tasks that can be delegated and the persons to whom you would like to delegate responsibility. Next, you prepare a job description for each activity you plan to delegate. Then you match the job to an individual's interests and abilities. Using these procedures your members can be successful in their new responsibilities.

Delegating in Order to Increase Members' Investment in the Group

When a facilitator is successful in delegating responsibility, the members become less dependent on a leader and more supportive of each other. And that is, after all, what support groups are all about. This chapter has activities to help you as a facilitator delegate activities according to members' capabilities.

One way to look at task delegation is to identify tasks performed during a meeting—and who does them.

Outline the events as they happened at your last group meeting. Following is a sample list that covers an imaginary, but rather typical, group's meeting:

3:45	Facilitator set out coffee and coffee cake, laid out resource display on table against wall.
3:50	First members arrive. Facilitator greeted them, served coffee, directed attention to resource table.
4:00	Most members present. Facilitator called on member to describe high and low points of past week. Encouraged discussion before proceeding to a different member.
4:30	Discussion of absenteeism, initiated by concern for missing member. Many members described transportation problems.
4:45	Introduction of guest speaker.
5:25	The facilitator ended the meeting with a preview of future meetings. Group members gave their farewells and left.

You can see that many of a facilitator's activities can be delegated. For example, at the opening, one member can set out refreshments, another can greet arriving members, and another can arrange the resource display. During the meeting one member can moderate the "news" time and another can introduce the speaker. Meanwhile, the facilitator can be free to focus on individual members, providing encouragement, analyzing performance, and determining what training would enable members to carry out their responsibilities even better.

Members can perform facilitation tasks before and after meetings as well as during the meeting itself. When you list all the activities of a meeting do not limit yourself to the agenda itself. Expand the list to include preparatory and follow-up activities.

Here are examples of preparatory and follow-up activities:

Preparatory Activities

Monday	Telephoned guest speaker to confirm engagement. Typed and mailed agenda planned at last meeting.
Tuesday	Went to local agency to get resource materials for display table.
Friday	Baked cookies and bought juice for refreshments.

Follow-up Activities

5:30	Clean-up. Returned chairs to original places.
Next day	Wrote and mailed thank-you letters to speaker and to agency providing resource materials.
Midweek	Telephoned member to reinforce suggestions given her by the support group.

As you can see, preparation and follow-up activities include still more opportunities for delegation. Exercise 6.1 is designed to identify some.

Tasks can be delegated only if the member (l) thoroughly understands what is expected, and (2) can perform all parts of the task. If the member does not understand the job, or is unable to perform it, delegation will only lower the member's self-esteem, and the member will tend to withdraw from the group rather than enhance it. Some tasks that seem simple to those of us who perform them often are really very complex to a person who has never done them before. It is safest to break down the task into all its component parts and write a job description for each. The example that follows is an analysis of just one task from our sample agenda.

Task: Setting-out Refreshments

Task Description

Fill the coffee urn with water
Add coffee grounds
Plug in coffee maker
Set out coffee cups
Set out sugar and cream
Set out food
Set out utensils
Assist in serving or appoint servers
Clean or appoint others to clean up

The next example shows how the task analysis and job description looks for the task Setting-out Refreshments. Exercise 6.2 will give you some practice in describing and analyzing a task.

Task: Setting-out Refreshments

Task Description	*Job Requirement*
Fill the coffee urn with water	Know how much water; be physically able to perform task; know when task is complete.
Add coffee grounds	Know how much grounds; be physically able to perform task; know when task is complete.
Plug in coffee maker	Know location of socket and extension cord.
Set out coffee cups	Know where they are stored; know how many to set out.
Set out sugar and cream	Know where to find; know how to fill containers.
Set out food	Know where to find; know how to fill containers.
Set out utensils	Determine what utensils individuals need to eat food and how many of each is needed; make decisions.
Assist in serving or appoint servers	Use social and management skills; delegate.
Clean or appoint others to clean up	Use social and management skills; delegate.

After you have completed Exercise 6.2 for a task that you want to delegate, you can decide whether a particular member can do all of the task, or can do parts of the task with assistance.

Look at the job requirements of the task you have analyzed. Think of the member of your group you were unsure could do the task. Does the member have all of the requirements? That is to say, could the member do all components of the task? Finally, could the member perform the components in the right sequence without coaching?

Take a second sheet of paper to use with your task analysis. Write the names of members who could do all parts of the task, who have all of the job requirements you listed in the right column. Make a second list with names of members who would need assistance, who could do only some components, who have only some of the

requirements, or who would need assistance in performing components in the right order. Next to their names specify what assistance each will need.

Delegating in Order to Address Members' Personal Objectives

So far discussion and activities have been concerned with how to delegate. One assumption has been that delegation is good for the group, that if members take responsibility within the group they will have a greater investment in the group's goals. Another underlying assumption is that if members are successful in assuming responsibility they will develop a greater feeling of self-worth.

Activities delegated to members can also be selected to help individual members reach personal objectives. This is done by analyzing tasks on the one hand (as was done in the first part of the chapter), and by analyzing members' needs on the other hand (directions follow).

Exercise 6.3 illustrates delegating activities in order to help individuals achieve personal goals.

Delegation is best done with caution. Begin by delegating one task to one member, selecting both the task and the member with attention to the complexity of the task, the member's capabilities, and the member's personal goals. It is safest to assume that the task must be taught as well as delegated. Referring to your task analysis, describe all the component parts of the task and be on hand to assist the person with any part.

If the person is successful in performing the task be sure the group acknowledges this as a meaningful contribution to the group's functioning. If the person is unsuccessful in any parts, draw attention to the parts that were performed successfully and treat the rest of the task as potential areas for personal development.

Summary

Through delegating responsibility to group members, the facilitator can create conditions that

- enable members to interact more with each other and depend less on interactions with the facilitator
- enhance members' sense of self-worth
- develop members' knowledge, skills, and attitudes
- free the facilitator to work with individuals or attend to more general needs of the group

Procedures that will help you delegate responsibility more effectively include

- list routine activities that take place during support group meetings
- analyze selected activities into component tasks and describe skills and prerequisites for performing these tasks
- determine members' personal objectives and current level of functioning
- match members' level of functioning and personal objectives to the identified activities
- provide training to help each member assume these responsibilities

Exercise 6.1. Delegating Tasks

Reconstruct the agenda of your last meeting (use a blank piece of paper). Also list the preparatory and follow-up activities. Star all the activities that were performed by the facilitator but *could* have been delegated to one or more members.

Take a fresh sheet of paper and draw two columns.

On the left, make a list of tasks based on one of your meeting agendas. In the same column also list all the preparatory and follow-up activities.

Across from each of these tasks and activities, in the right-hand column, list the members to whom you could delegate that task. List only members you are certain could do the task. If you would like to delegate a specific task to a certain member, but are uncertain that the member can do it, you will want to analyze the task.

The third and final step is to analyze any complex tasks before delegating them. Also analyze tasks before delegating them to persons of limited ability.

Tasks	Member (notes)

Exercise 6.2. Preparing a Task Description and Analysis

Select one of the tasks from your meetings, one of the tasks that you would like to delegate, and break it down to its components.

Each component in your list has its own job requirements. Accordingly, at the right of each component, describe what qualifications a person must have in order to do that part of the task.

Task: _____

Task Description	**Job Requirement**

Exercise 6.3. Addressing Individual Goals through Delegating Activities

Start with a blank sheet of paper.

Step 1. List members' names and, after each name, list personal objectives for that member: attitudes, skills, or information that person needs to acquire. These objectives may be the individual's own, shared with you, or what you as facilitator hope the person will derive from membership in the group.

Step 2. Match members' personal objectives with tasks that might be delegated.

Look at the meeting agenda you prepared in step 2 of the first activity in this chapter. Find matches between each member's personal objectives and tasks you identified. You are looking for activities that can be a good "training ground" for members if they are delegated that task.

For example, if a member's objective is to identify resources on a particular subject, she or he may be the appropriate individual to lay out the display table. If another member wants practice meeting the public, an appropriate assignment may be to greet members as they arrive.

You will find that analyzing tasks, as you did in Exercise 6.2, will make it even easier to identify tasks that can help a specific member attain her or his objectives.

7

Training Group Members to Facilitate

In the last chapter we talked about delegating responsibility. One of the greatest responsibilities you may find yourself delegating is the role of group facilitator. You may want a helper to save yourself from "burn out." You may need to leave the group for one reason or another. Or you may simply view facilitation by another person as good for the group. One source of facilitators is the group itself. This chapter will explain how you can identify potential facilitators in your own group.

Identifying Potential Facilitators

It is no easy task to become an effective group facilitator. First, not everyone is cut out to be a group facilitator. It requires a certain kind of person, one who is skillful at working with people. You can screen group members as potential facilitators by observing their personal habits and assessing their attitudes.

A good candidate for the role group facilitator is

- punctual, reliable, responsible
- friendly, warm, and courteous to all members
- helpful and sincere
- imaginative, creative, self-reliant
- self-controlled, self-disciplined

Assess each member of your group. Identify those individuals who have all or most of the identified attributes. Interview each member who scores high on those attributes. Ask each if she or he is interested in taking more responsibility for the group's operation.

If the individuals are willing, the first step is rate their current leadership skills. Exercise 7.1 is intended to aid in this process.

Potential facilitators need skill working with groups. There are many tasks associated with facilitation that can be assigned to individual members. They also give the facilitator the opportunity to observe the individual and make an assessment about how well suited the individual is to the facilitator's role.

Exercise 7.2 contains a list of suggested tasks that you might consider assigning to group members. It can also be used to evaluate performance on these tasks.

Training Potential Facilitators

Once you have identified potential facilitators, you need to prepare goals and objectives that will lead them to learn the role. A good place to start is to review the behaviors set forth on the checklist in Exercise 7.2. Go over them with the person.

Goals and objectives must be established in a joint planning session. Discuss the importance of each in group facilitation. This list can become the first approximation of a list of goals for the trainee.

Once goals and objectives are established, decide how well the individual should perform the activity. This performance level becomes the criterion against which to judge performance. As always, the specifics must be worked out in conjunction with the individual. State criteria in terms that enable both you and the trainee to recognize when an objective is reached.

You are now in a position to set forth the training schedule. In consultation with the trainee, identify group activities that will help develop each skill and attitude represented in the goals and objectives. Devise a schedule for delegating more and more of the facilitator's activities to the trainee. Also, establish a schedule for regular meetings during which you and the trainee will evaluate performance and progress.

If possible, arrange for the individual to work with other group facilitators. Have group facilitators other than yourself work with and evaluate the trainee. Try to locate potential training activities outside of the group.

Summary

The members of your group may include individuals with the potential of becoming skilled facilitators. Certainly these individuals are in a good position to identify and empathize with members of support groups. You can identify potential facilitators and begin their training within the context of the group itself. You are in a position to make a major contribution to the individual development of selected group members and to the future of the entire program. It is up to you to take full advantage of the opportunity.

Exercise 7.1. Leadership Skill Rating

How well do the potential facilitators support other members in the group. You can rate each group member on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high) on the following dimensions:

___ adheres strictly to group rules

___ maintains confidentiality

___ encourages others to participate

___ becomes a model of nondefensive behavior

___ listens attentively

___ takes an active role in relieving group tensions

___ helps other group members express ideas

___ promotes acceptance within the group

___ works toward a group norm for assisting others

___ discourages nonproductive behavior

___ manages conflicts within the group

___ confronts different issues

Exercise 7.2. Facilitator Development Skills List

Evaluate potential facilitators by giving them increased responsibility and observing how well they can perform the following tasks:

1. prepare an agenda

2. take responsibility to lead a portion of the meeting

3. structure the proceedings so that members can focus attention and effort

4. keep the discussion organized and on track

5. summarize and integrate

6. examine group progress and obtain action commitments

7. convey a sense of direction and progress when closing the meeting

8

Solving Those Not-So-Petty Problems

At one time or another, every group finds itself in need of something it cannot find or cannot afford. It might be a particular book or resource, it might be a guest speaker, a place to meet, child care, or transportation for a special event. It is often something not big enough to make a case for federal funding! But, nonetheless, little needs are important. They can affect group activities and may detract from members' sense of well-being.

There are, of course, traditional solutions to these problems. Perhaps membership dues or "passing the hat" at meetings is feasible, perhaps not. But there are other ways to address these needs, ways that bring new meanings to "support" groups.

One way is a concept called networking. Let your support group collaborate on both understanding and solving problems.

Steps in Solving Problems

The philosopher John Dewey offers some help for solving problems. He speculated that the problem-solving process could be divided into five steps. These steps are (1) define the problem, (2) develop hypotheses about possible solutions, (3) select what appears to be an appropriate solution, (4) try out the solution, and (5) evaluate the outcome. A sixth step might be added: (6) based on the evaluation, repeat the earlier steps until an effective solution is found.

Step 1 is to *define* the problem. If you don't know clearly what the problem is, it is doubtful that you will be able to find a good solution. Recall the parent who, when his child asked "Daddy, where did I come from," launched into a well-prepared explanation of human reproduction to which the child responded, "That's funny, Johnny comes from Chicago!"

The second step is to develop an extensive list of possible solutions. Dewey calls these solutions *hypotheses*. The challenge in this step is to list as many potential solutions as possible, in a setting free from worry about whether they are reasonable. Since you are not committed to actually implementing any particular solution, you can be free-wheeling. In fact, adopting a free-wheeling attitude has a definite function. Even ridiculous, "crazy" ideas can break mind sets and help find new ways of thinking about problems.

The third step, *selecting*, requires that you be reasonable. Look at the entire set of hypotheses and identify those with the best chance of succeeding. Examine their pros and cons. From the hypotheses that appear to have the best chance of succeeding, select one to try first.

The next step is to actually *test* the solution identified. Make a plan and set the solution into operation. Give it its best chance of succeeding.

Finally, look at the outcome—*evaluate*. To properly evaluate, you will need

to examine the solution and—*in advance*—decide what outcomes will indicate success or failure. Based on this evaluation, you may wish to make changes in the hypothesis and test it once again.

Problem Solving in the Support Group

With this procedure as background, let us turn to problem solving within the context of a support group. First, consider the kind of group that is involved. It is a *support* group. Any problem is not just the leader's problem. It's the group's problem. Everyone must assume the responsibility for the solution.

As facilitator, it is not appropriate for you to solve problems for the group. However, you can play an important role. You can help the group focus its attention on the problem. Remember Dewey's steps. You can play a role in each step.

In an overall sense, you can suggest some ways for the group to approach the problem-solving process itself. If the group has problems getting started, you might review the five steps as a model to adopt.

If the group is stymied and cannot seem to get started, you might suggest breaking the task into the five steps and approach the problem one step at a time. It is difficult to solve a problem if you do not know what the problem is. Step 1 recommends that the group first spend time and effort simply figuring out the problem. Often this can be a major stimulus to problem solving.

The second step, hypothesis stating, can benefit from a "brainstorming" session. To get a brainstorming session started, suggest that the members begin by calling out solutions as fast as they can. Some may be reluctant, afraid that their ideas may appear crazy. Note that the idea is to get all ideas, no matter how "crazy." You may even reward far-out ideas with special attention.

A brainstorming session can offer a good opportunity to delegate. If there is a person in the group who writes fast, suggest that she or he serve as recorder. This recorder should write down "crazy" and "sensible" ideas with equal enthusiasm. If the group understands the function of the hypothesis-stating exercise and that no one is committed to follow any particular idea, then a greater level of creativity may result.

A couple of comments about brainstorming are appropriate here. "Crazy" ideas have a very important role in the brainstorming process. They serve a definite function by helping break rigid mind sets and opening up new avenues. But some individuals can find the concept of suggesting weird and unusual solutions threatening. If there is a problem getting the group to relax and participate enthusiastically, you might suggest practice at brainstorming using something that is not threatening as a problem. Choose something bizarre like 100 ways to get an elephant into a van or how to contain a drop of water with a rubber band.

After the group has a sizeable list of potential solutions, the group is ready for the third step, selecting possible solutions. After discussion about the pros and cons of the many brainstormed solutions, the group members are ready to select the most reasonable solutions. From this they can decide which will be tested.

One of the best ways to look for solutions is within the group itself. This gives group members the opportunity to assume responsibility. They can feel needed and appreciated within the relatively safe confines of the group. Moreover, a group that solves its own problems is a more cohesive organization.

When the group reaches the third step, *selection*, be clear that this is not necessarily the finished solution. In this way you avoid having members become discouraged if their first attempt fails. As soon as you have decided what to try first, review what is left to try should the first attempt fail. Then go about developing the

best possible procedure for implementing your initial plan. Use the same model your members use in pursuing personal goals. Divide the plan into parts. Label the parts to determine if certain steps must be taken ahead of others. Write down the resources you will need to succeed in each part of the plan. Set target dates and appoint people to be responsible for each part. Persons responsible should meet to coordinate their efforts and set a date when all the parts can come together.

In step 4 the group implements their plan. The facilitator's job is to encourage each person involved, to make sure they have the resources and skills they need, and that they communicate with each other. The facilitator can also help them recognize when they are finished.

Finally, you are ready to evaluate. Is the problem solved? Can you congratulate yourselves? Is it only partly solved? Do you need to do whatever you were doing harder and longer? Were you unsuccessful? Isn't it good that you planned some other solutions at step 2?

Building a Network

Exercise 8.1 may help a group develop its ability to solve problems. It encourages "networking." The idea is to build a network in which all members can communicate in order to solve problems.

Once the group has developed its "catalog" by completing Exercise 8.1, you can use this catalog to enhance communication within the group. Ask members to volunteer to read their lists aloud. The goal: to stimulate the concept that each person has something worthwhile to offer, to barter. Have others indicate whether they can (1) use the individual's skill, or (2) can supply a solution to a problem. Next step: work out trades. Are there any match-ups where one person will "sell" what another person wants to "buy"? Did anyone think of more things they could "sell" when they found out what other people wanted to "buy"?

Think complex. Sometimes finding a solution requires complex problem solving. If you can't work out a two-person trade, maybe you can work out a three-way trade. Suppose Ann wants something Carrie will sell but Carrie doesn't want anything Ann has to sell. Can you find a "intermediary" who can deal with both Ann and Carrie so that everyone gets something they want?

Think "MegaNet." Don't restrict your network to your own support group. Try to get other support groups, other organizations, and other individuals to participate in your networking catalog. That way you can sometimes "purchase" things without money and get what you want without having to ask favors.

Think volunteerism. Encourage members to barter their services and skills for an item or service that the *group* needs. Create a "Buy and Sell" page for your support group as a whole. Your group not only has some needs that are different from the individual members', it also has some potential contributions that members could not make independently. Individuals might need transportation, but not if the group as a whole found a better and more central meeting place. Individuals might have household goods to sell, but the group could gather enough to advertise for a yard sale!

Summary

The group, individually and collectively, can be a major source of solutions to problems. Following are some questions that will help you focus on the needs of a group as a whole:

- What problems face individuals in your group and what problems face the group as a whole? The *Buy* column developed in the "networking" technique is a good way to obtain a list of problems.
- What resources does your group have to solve problems? The *Sell* column of the "networking" form will help here.

Build a catalog of needs and solutions. Use your experience solving one problem to help you solve another!

Exercise 8.1. Building a Network

Give everyone a sheet of paper with two columns, one headed *Buy* and the other headed *Sell*. In the *Buy* column have them list things they want but do not have: objects (or the use of objects), information, services, favors, skills, experiences, talents. In the *Sell* column have them list everything they have that they would sell or trade or share: objects (or the use of objects), information, services, favors, skills, and talents.

Buy	**Sell**

9

Finding New Support

Some groups are self-sufficient. They get along by taking turns facilitating, providing a meeting place, preparing snacks, donating materials. Some groups have phenomenal fund-raising skills and are able to raise their own operating funds with bake sales, yard sales, and other creative projects. Some group members are in a position to pay for the group's services in the same spirit that they pay for groceries, dental care, or a movie.

But some groups have needs which cannot be met internally. They need outside support to continue their program. This section covers ways to seek outside support effectively.

As a first step in seeking support, define your problem. Evaluate your needs and appraise exactly what is needed. (In short, you must perform the problem-solving activities outlined in the previous chapter.) Identify each need and estimate its cost. Estimate the *annual* cost and be able to explain how you came up with the figure. Estimate the number and amount of each item. Be specific. If you need funds to pay a facilitator, estimate pay-per-hour, then get the annual estimate by multiplying hours times pay rate. If you must pay transportation or other costs, include them in your computations.

Learning to Cost

Exercise 9.1 contains a list of needs that is typical of many support groups. Ask the group to identify those that are appropriate for your group, then perform the exercise in estimating the annual cost.

Now consider those needs that can be supplied by the group itself. For example, members might be able to take turns bringing cookies to meetings. Possibly the group could meet in members' homes. Can the group seek guest speakers from agencies that supply them free of charge? Can the facilitator's paid time be reduced? Can some of the functions of the facilitator be delegated to group members?

Although each need identified in the analysis has a cost attached, carefully explore the possibilities for obtaining the goods or service directly. You do not have to come up with the cash to rent a meeting location if some organization is willing to donate a space. The problem is to locate organizations and individuals who may offer such help.

Approaching Potential Contributors

The group itself may be an important help in identifying outside assistance. Encourage the members to help identify sources for meeting the various material, service, and budget items. As a group, review your goals and needs. Then ask,

"Which agencies, organizations, or individuals are trying to accomplish similar goals and may be willing to help?" Develop and review a list of potential contributors.

Before you approach the agency, learn everything you can about about their goals, activities, resources, and clients. Decide exactly what you want to ask them for—materials, use of facilities, human resources, money. Look for ways that they can help themselves by helping you! Keep in mind that if you convince the agency to help you, they will also look good. Show them the public relations value of helping you—they may become more receptive.

Decide how to approach the organization and who in your group should be the spokesperson. Should you, the facilitator, make the first contact? Should the facilitator make the presentation? Would a member of the group be more effective? How about a committee? As your group answers these questions, a strategy for approaching potential support agencies will emerge.

When you present your group's needs to the potential contributor, follow a plan that will give strength to the presentation. A good way to begin is to describe what your group is trying to achieve and what it has accomplished so far. Do this briefly and succinctly. Encourage their questions and feedback. Try to locate areas of common concern. If you have done your homework, you are more likely to make a positive impression and achieve a more positive response.

Be open with potential contributors. Tell them what resources you have already assembled and what needs remain. Be direct. Ask for things they are most likely to give. Ask for things that cost little or nothing. Perhaps they will make available long distance "trunk" lines. Maybe they would let you use a meeting room or copy machine.

Sometimes a contributor will be interested in helping, but is hesitant to enter into a "long-term contract." If a potential contributor appears interested but hesitant, suggest trying it for a month or two and set a time to reevaluate the working relationship.

Do not overlook the possibility that one potential contributor can help you find other potential contributors. If they suggest you contact someone else, ask if they would let you use them as a reference.

If it is clear that your activities enhance theirs, you can ask without apology. For example, if they are encouraged to refer their own clients to your support group, they may be willing to contribute part or all of a facilitator's pay. Public relations is a fertile area in which your group can support the needs of a potential contributor. Can the group find a way to publicize the contributor's services or products? Can you help them build a "good guy in public service" image? If so, they may be open to paying costs in return for favorable publicity.

If your group's goals are not clearly in line with those of the potential contributor, look for some other way for group members to serve them. Can members volunteer time to their agency in return for assistance to your group? Do you have something else to barter? Remember the concept of "networking" introduced in the last chapter.

Using Your Network

You don't have to get all of your help from one person, one organization, or one source. Remember: here a little, there a little! Ask every agency, organization, and individual you contact to suggest who else might provide assistance. Ask everyone in your group to do the same. Approach service clubs. Consult foundation directories. Contact national organizations and their local chapters. Look at public

funds from federal, state, and local agencies. Ask to be put on mailing lists in order to receive announcements of any funds being made available. If you decide to apply for a grant, a contract, or other assistance, you may want to do it in cooperation with an agency. It may even be a requirement. It's just another way of networking!

Some items or services might already be contributed by an organization. Perhaps you are willing to use your own phone or volunteer a limited amount of time. If the group could survive no other way, how much time would you personally be willing to donate. Or do you know another qualified person who could take over? Could you train someone in your group?

If you find yourself volunteering services as a facilitator, be sure to "cash in" on the experience in other ways. Find out if your professional time is deductible on your income tax. List your responsibilities in your résumé as proof of your management, leadership, fund-raising, interpersonal, and communication skills. Carrying out these responsibilities also establishes your good judgment, resourcefulness, self-discipline, dependability, and energy. Look at every contact you make—with individuals, agencies, and organizations—as a way of networking for yourself and your own career as well as networking for your support group.

Summary

A support group needs many things. Many of these needs can be filled by using the techniques provided in this book. Often the capacity to fill needs is already present in the group itself.

Needs can also be met outside the group. When approaching outside agencies, it is necessary to have a clear plan. You need to know in advance what you need and how much the solutions cost. Sometimes you will need to "wheel and deal" in order to obtain help.

Exercise 9.1. Cost Analysis Form

Need	Annual Cost (Units x Cost = Total)
Facilitator	
Pay	
Transportation	
Other costs	
Transportation (members)	
Special services (Specify)	
Rent	
Meeting space	
Office space	
Guest speakers	
Stipend	
Transportation	
Other cost	
Books, materials	
Printing and duplication	
Telephone	
Postage	
Refreshments	
Other (specify)	
Totals	

For each need listed in the left column, enter the number of items (units) the group needs and the cost of each unit. Then compute the total cost.

Appendix

Co-Facilitation

John Hale and Gerald Buchan

Why Should Group Leaders Consider Co-Facilitation?

Co-facilitation takes extra planning time and evaluation time. For facilitators new to each other considerable time and effort is necessary in establishing norms and ground rules, which can still then be violated and result in misunderstanding at best and mutual sabotage at worst.

Of course, the reasons for co-facilitation outweigh the drawbacks. Group dynamics are difficult to follow for the most experienced of group therapists. Often tapes are made of sessions and evaluated an infinite number of times, and new discoveries are made at each viewing. Two leaders are at least twice as good as one leader at picking up group dynamics.

With co-facilitators, one can remain passive, viewing the group as a camera while looking for themes or ideas that are not readily available when one facilitator is active in leading or discussing issues in a groupwide context.

Other benefits of co-facilitation are elaborated below. They include the ability of co-facilitators to represent two sides of an issue, to demonstrate risk taking while one directs, to offer nurturing and "pushing" simultaneously and to provide a model of healthy communication and interaction.

Review of Literature

Authors who talk about co-therapy (facilitation) emphasize the need for the co-facilitators to be as equal as possible in the eyes of themselves and the group. As Yalom says,

> A co-therapy arrangement of anything other than two therapists of completely equal status is, in my experience, inadvisable . . . [and] a partnership in which the two therapists are of nominally equal status but are in actuality widely different in competence and sensitivity will almost invariably result in serious difficulty for the group. After a few meetings the members are clearly aware of the strain between the two leaders and this, if marked, leads to a tense, inhibited group. (Yalom, 1975, p. 420)

According to Rosenbaum,

> The idea of a co-therapy relationship promotes anxiety in the majority of psychotherapists. . . . [It] demands maturity and sensitivity in both therapists. Besides having to define interaction in the group, therapists are confronted with many of

> their own unresolved problems in a co-therapist relationship. . . . [T]he acknowledged tension between co-therapists may further therapeutic change. (Rosenbaum, 1971, p. 507)

In spite of logical and therapeutic reasons for the use of co-facilitators, Yalom cites research that concludes that beneficial effects of co-facilitation cannot be demonstrated (Yalom, 1975, p. 420).

Issues of Co-Facilitation

Gender issues in co-facilitation are an important variable. The nature of the group would certainly help decide whether the therapists would be male and or female. An all-female group with female issues, such as the disabled women project that inspired this paper, would probably want to choose female co-facilitators. However, if issues of gender would be anticipated, a case could be made for bouncing gender issues off a healthy male co-therapist. If the group is mixed, the mixed co-facilitators model makes a lot of sense.

Just as a group over the course of its life develops norms, roles, and rules, co-facilitators must do the same.

Norms will be based on such variables as belief systems, temperament, education, and life experiences. The co-facilitators will need to work together to communicate, with exemplary openness, what their approaches are to the group specifically and life in general. Before the group begins, the co-facilitators will need to decide what their goals for the group are. They need to recognize that even these goals can change based on input from the group. Co-facilitators need to be mutually comfortable with change.

Here is an example. Facilitators with differing beliefs about what kind of work is helpful in the group context will need to make an accommodation. One facilitator may believe that the historical perspective of a problem is useful, and encourage the group to discuss prior experiences and history. The other facilitator may believe that anything really important is happening in the present, and anything that still has importance from the past will be manifest in the present. So, while one facilitator is busy showing interest in a member talking about her/his childhood, the other facilitator may be trying to change the subject.

Rules of the group obviously need to be worked out by the co-facilitators, at least as they pertain to time, duration, fees, preliminary membership, etc. More overt and covert rules are developed as the group evolves. There are exceptions to this described below.

It is useful to establish some facilitation roles prior to forming the group. For example, the authors usually establish that the warm-up functions will be performed by one and the early theory will be provided by the other. As the authors have evolved their co-facilitation over the years they have learned to take the roles that play out their individual strengths. Possible roles to divide are prober or supporter, thinker or feeler, worker or player, etc.

Nurturing Co-Facilitation

Co-facilitation needs to be nurtured even after the group is established. Time should be set aside to debrief and plan for the next session and time should be set aside in which there is no agenda except to examine the co-facilitators' relationship. It is useful for such a time to be taken over a beer, ice cream, coffee, or all of the above (just seeing if you're paying attention!). So both a worklike and a playlike

atmosphere are useful in the nurturance of the co-facilitation relationship. Times to do the work need to be kept sacred since they are the easiest times to give up on the face of busy schedules. In the initial phases of the facilitator relationship the time should be at least weekly.

In the work phase of the relationship building, it may be useful to use an objective set of questions based on items from the Human Development Institute's *Group Perception Inventory* (Buchan and Hale, 1982). By addressing these questions each time it will become more difficult to avoid sensitive issues. Measuring the interaction in this way can also be a way to measure gains, or deterioration, in the co-facilitation relationship. Should it become obvious that the relationship is deteriorating, the team should have no hesitation in contacting a consultant to look for hidden issues and communication barriers.

The Human Development Institute's *Group Perception Inventory* is a useful tool not only to measure a group's perception of itself, but with minor changes, it is useful as a schedule for co-facilitator evaluation.

Summary

Co-facilitation has its benefits and drawbacks. Although research has not proven the superiority of co-facilitation, it is in practice a safer, more satisfying way to proceed given that the facilitators respect each other, communicate, and agree on directions and agendas.

HDI GROUP PERCEPTION INVENTORY INSTRUCTIONS

Circle one of the numbers (0 through 5) in each row to indicate your perception regarding the group as a whole. Your choices indicate the phrases from the top (diagonal) which fit best for you with each phrase on the side. For example, by circling the five in the first row you would be saying of the group, 'They can always be counted on to level with me.' On some items the numbers are in reverse order; you will still use the number directly below the phrase you wish to choose. For example, by circling the 4 in the eighth row you would be saying, 'Most of the time they will not act "judgmental" with me.'

	They can always be counted on to:	Very typically I expect them to:	I would usually expect them to:	I would not count on them to:	Most of the time they will not:	I would never expect them to:	
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	level with me.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	get the drift of what I am trying to say.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	include me in what's going on.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	accept me for what I am.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	feel free to let me know when I 'bug' them.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	perceive what kind of person I really am.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	be interested in me.
( ) ———	5	4	3	2	1	0	act 'judgmental' with me.
( ) ———	5	4	3	2	1	0	keep things to themselves to spare my feelings.
( ) ———	5	4	3	2	1	0	misconstrue things I say or do.
( ) ———	5	4	3	2	1	0	interrupt or ignore my comments.
( ) ———	5	4	3	2	1	0	ridicule me or disapprove if I show my peculiarities.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	be completely frank with me.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	recognize readily when something is bothering me.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	respect me as a person apart from my skills or status.
( ) ———	0	1	2	3	4	5	provide an atmosphere where I can be myself.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The first step in scoring the Group Perception Inventory is to copy the numbers that you have circled in the parentheses () at the left of each row. For example if you had circled the 4 in the first row and the 5 in the next row you would now write the 4 and 5 in the first two parentheses on the left, like this:

(4) ——— 0 1 2 3 4 5 level with me.
(5) ——— 0 1 2 3 4 5 get the drift

You will now have four numbers directly over each of the four boxes at the lower left side of the form. The next step is to add the four numbers directly above each box and write the sum in that box.

The four scores which you have obtained give an index of the relation of the group to you in the following four ways:

G — Genuineness: The extent that you see the group as honest and open with you, saying what they mean and respecting your ability to 'take it'.

U — Understanding: The extent to which the group seems receptive to your feelings and ideas and understands you as a person.

V — Value: The extent to which the group seems to value you for what you are; to hold you in high esteem or high regard.

A — Acceptance: The extent that the group seems to be willing to let you be yourself, to be different from others and seems not to have a stake in pushing you toward some kind of change which would make you more acceptable to them.

Mark the four boxes G, U, V and A for convenience in examining your scores.

Code: 0706

Strategies for Maintaining a Support Group

DISABLED WOMEN FACE special trials that only other disabled women can fully understand: transportation problems, wheelchair access, feelings of isolation and helplessness. Support groups are an important way for women to share experiences, problems, solutions, and friendship. *Strategies for Maintaining a Support Group* is designed to help these groups—especially those that cater to disabled women—establish healthy, supportive ways to work through difficulties and, most importantly, keep going.

Developed by the Educational Equity Network of Disabled Women and Girls at the Oregon Health Sciences University, this resource addresses problems common to maintaining any support group: delegating responsibility, maintaining attendance, rekindling trust and communication as membership changes, and training new facilitators. The activities included range from checklists that assist facilitators in gathering and evaluating information about the group and its members to exercises that help empower group members and get them involved in the group's success.

PEARL L. PAULSON served as project director of the Educational Equity Network of Disabled Women and Girls at the Oregon Health Sciences University, a two-year project funded by the Department of Education's Women's Educational Equity Act Program. The project organized support groups, each co-facilitated by a disabled woman and a service provider, for approximately one hundred disabled women and girls. Paulson earned her Ph.D. in educational psychology from Stanford University and is currently coordinator for programs for the mildly handicapped in the Beaverton Public Schools, Beaverton, Oregon.

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